

Response to Mahir Gachabayov, et al, ‘Methodological Biases May Render a Clinical Study Underpowered’

Manuel Jakob^{1,2}, Guido Beldi, MD¹

¹Department of Visceral Surgery and Medicine, University Hospital, Bern, Switzerland

²Department of Microbiology, Infectious Diseases and Immunology,

Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Germany

Corresponding author and address for reprints: Guido Beldi, MD. Department of Visceral Surgery and Medicine, Bern University Hospital, Bern, Switzerland. Office: 0041 316328275. guido.beldi@insel.ch

E-mail addresses of authors: Manuel Jakob: manuel.jakob@charite.de, Guido Beldi: guido.beldi@insel.ch

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To the editorial board of Journal of Trauma

We acknowledge the letter to the editor and the potential conflicts of interests of the authors.

To avoid selection bias, the inclusion or exclusion of patients was carried out by an independent emergency department physician who included patients at the emergency department (please refer to page 42 of the trial protocol [\(1\)](#)). The ASA scores reported in the manuscript correspond to the scores as recorded by anesthesiologists at a later time point after the inclusion of study participants. Indeed, in some patients, the ASA score may have deteriorated after the study inclusion. Furthermore, the severity of comorbidities may have been estimated differently by physicians at study inclusion and anesthesiologists, leading to higher recorded ASA scores by the latter. Of note no patient rated as ASA 5 died within 30 days of the operation.

We acknowledge that many surgical facilities may not be familiar with intra-abdominal placement of mesh and this lack of experience may be detrimental to outcome. However, at the Bern University Hospital, placement of intra-abdominal meshes is performed routinely in both emergency and elective procedures. The implantation of intra-abdominal mesh has not been shown to be associated with specific complications in previous studies published by our department [\(2-6\)](#)~~[1-5]~~. Furthermore, the described complications in patients following mesh placement, such as mesh dissolution, non-integration into the abdominal wall or late onset mesh infection are unlikely to be related to the surgical technique.

Our study was designed and powered for incisional hernia as its primary outcome. However, detection bias as described in the letter to the editor concerns a safety outcome and not the primary outcome parameter. We agree with the authors that the meshes should not affect anastomotic healing and patient deterioration. However, patients #3 and #10 both had severe mesh-associated complications such as torn mesh, necrosis or hematoma of the abdominal wall that are highly likely to become clinically apparent. In addition, case #12, had a type 2 surgical site infection according to CDC criteria (7)~~[6]~~.

Based on the letter to the editor by Gachabayov and Latifi, we recalculated the p-value in question using SPSS and received the same result as reported in our publication. The corresponding SPSS output has been made available to the editorial board.

This study has been designed to assess incisional herniation in an at risk patient cohort. However, the significantly higher rate of complications seen with the implantation of Strattice meshes did not allow the completion of the study and to reach the primary endpoint. Therefore this study is obviously underpowered to identify differences for the primary endpoint. However, the main statement of the publication is the description of safety related events, which were significantly different. Thus, we disagree with the authors of this letter that no robust conclusion can be drawn from this study. Based on the results of this study, the prophylactic use of biologic Strattice meshes cannot be recommended in patients undergoing emergency abdominal surgery because of safety concerns.

Your Sincerely,

Manuel Jakob, MD

Guido Beldi, MD

References:

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Authors contributions: Jakob M.O., Beldi G.: Writing of the manuscript.

Supplemental Material: SPSS output HPACS (<http://links.lww.com/TA/B826>)

CROSSTABS

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/FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES

/STATISTICS=CHISQ

/CELLS=COUNT ROW

/COUNT ROUND CELL

/METHOD=EXACT TIMER(5) .

Crosstabs

| Notes | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
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| Comments | | |
| Input | Data | \\FILER300\USERS3002\0073998\Desktop\HPACS\HPACS SPSS\HPACS interim 7.sav |
| | Active Dataset | DataSet1 |
| | Filter | Abdominal wall complication |
| | Weight | <none> |
| | Split File | <none> |
| | N of Rows in Working Data File | 13 |
| Missing Value Handling | Definition of Missing | User-defined missing values are treated as missing. |
| | Cases Used | Statistics for each table are based on all the cases with valid data in the specified range(s) for all variables in each table. |
| Syntax | | CROSSTABS /TABLES=Strattice BY Dindo_greater_2_abdominal_wall_complication /FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES /STATISTICS=CHISQ /CELLS=COUNT ROW /COUNT ROUND CELL /METHOD=EXACT TIMER(5). |
| Resources | Processor Time | 00:00:00.05 |
| | Elapsed Time | 00:00:00.06 |

Notes

| | |
|---------------------------|------------|
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| Time for Exact Statistics | 0:00:00.01 |

Case Processing Summary

| | Valid | | Cases Missing | | Total | |
|---|-------|---------|---------------|---------|-------|---------|
| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| Strattice * Dindo_greater_2_abdominal_wall_complication | 13 | 100.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 13 | 100.0% |

Strattice * Dindo_greater_2_abdominal_wall_complication Crosstabulation

| | | | Dindo_greater_2_abdominal_wall_complication | | |
|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|---|--------|--------|
| | | | 0 | 1 | Total |
| Strattice | 0 | Count | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| | | % within Strattice | 85.7% | 14.3% | 100.0% |
| | 1 | Count | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| | | % within Strattice | 16.7% | 83.3% | 100.0% |
| Total | Count | 7 | 6 | 13 | |
| | % within Strattice | 53.8% | 46.2% | 100.0% | |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 6.198 ^a | 1 | .013 | .029 | .025 |
| Continuity Correction ^b | 3.731 | 1 | .053 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 6.796 | 1 | .009 | .029 | .025 |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .029 | .025 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 5.721 ^c | 1 | .017 | .029 | .025 |
| N of Valid Cases | 13 | | | | |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Point Probability |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | |
| Continuity Correction ^b | |
| Likelihood Ratio | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .024 |
| N of Valid Cases | |

- a. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.77.
- b. Computed only for a 2x2 table
- c. The standardized statistic is 2.392.